



# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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## Position Paper 2022-01

### **Suicide Prevention among SMVF**

**OBJECTIVE:** To maintain momentum on state-level efforts to prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) in the Commonwealth of Virginia by hiring a dedicated veterans suicide prevention coordinator; building on efforts to identify, screen, and refer for services; creating a unified, cohesive system for data collection and analysis; and continuing efforts to build public awareness.

### **BACKGROUND:**

- The Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (Governor's Challenge) has yielded success in coordinating the efforts of state, federal, and local government agencies, non-profits, and other partners to prevent suicide, but a dedicated state SMVF prevention coordinator in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) is critical for sustained effort;
- A key priority for the Governor's Challenge team is to identify and screen for suicide risk. *Virginia's Identify SMVF, Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services (VISR)* pilot is yielding results, but more effort in this area is needed.
- Virginia has a patchwork system of collecting and analyzing current suicide data. Currently available suicide data is often several years old. More timely information – from VISR and from state and federal resources, is needed.
- Understanding and assessing the results of suicide prevention efforts is a challenge. A publicly-reported/accessible means of assessing effectiveness of SMVF suicide-prevention efforts is warranted.
- Suicidal individuals are often hesitant to seek help. Increasing public awareness and providing training to front-line workers will help.

### **DISCUSSION:**

- A dedicated SMVF suicide prevention coordinator should be hired to accomplish these objectives:
  - Promote a centralized data collection point and determine current lethal means of suicide among SMVF in Virginia;

- Collect additional data regarding suicide prevention awareness efforts to help determine best practices and focus future efforts;
- In conjunction with other state agencies, continue to develop effective protocols for suicide risk screening and delivery of life saving services for perceived suicidal individuals; and
- With partner agencies, develop an online training program to provide basic crisis skills and suicide risk screening to community services providers, Veterans Service Organizations, and other partners.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly approve funding and corresponding legislation to create a dedicated SMVF coordinator position in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to continue to unify efforts in this area; build on efforts to identify, screen for risk, and refer to resources; to research, study and provide timely data on actual method/cause of suicides in the Commonwealth; to help roll out an online training tool for front-line providers; and to continue to build public awareness in this area.